INFANTILE PARALYSIS

(POLIOMYELITIS)

SOME SAFETY MEASURES

INFANTILE PARALYSIS (or poliomyelitis) is a disease in which proper treatment given *immediately* can greatly influence the course of the illness. Every day's delay increases the chances of paralysis. It is essential, therefore, that you should know something about the disease—particularly the early symptoms, so that, if any of your children develops a suspicious illness when there is an epidemic in your neighbourhood you will know what to do before the doctor comes to give you expert advice. In this way you will be able to give your child the best chance of complete recovery.

Nature of the Disease

Infantile paralysis is an infectious disease caused by a very small germ (or virus). The name is misleading since the disease also attacks older children and grown ups, and spreads from person to person wherever people mix closely together—in the home, in trains and buses, in schools and cinemas and in other meeting places.

The spread of the disease is made easier by the fact that the germs can be carried, and passed to other people by healthy persons, or by people who have suffered from a mild unrecognised attack without paralysis.

Warning Signs

The disease generally begins in an indefinite way. So if there is an epidemic in your district and any member of your family suddenly becomes off-colour and develops feverish or other symptoms that do not seem to point to any readily recognisable ailment, *put him to bed at once*, keep him *completely at rest*, and call in the doctor. It is impossible to overstress the importance of complete rest from the beginning. It has been shown beyond any doubt that this simple act will do more than anything else to prevent the development, or lessen the severity of paralysis.

Protection of Others

Until your doctor has seen the sick person and given you expert advice, however, there are some things you can do to safeguard the others in the home.

Keep the rest of the family away from the sick person. Keep all the things he uses—dishes, spoons, towels, and chamber pot separate. The germs may be in the throat or in the bowels and pass out in the breath or in the stool. So see that all members of the household give special attention to such details as washing the hands after a visit to the W.C., and using a handkerchief if they cough or sneeze.

General Safety Measures

If there is an epidemic in your district there is no need to interrupt the essential activities of life, or to isolate your children. But it is wise not to bathe in rivers or canals, and to avoid visiting a house where someone is sick—until you know what the illness is. You should also go easy with strenuous exercise, and avoid late hours. Plenty of rest is specially valuable at such times. Keep all food protected from flies—especially food, *e.g.*, fruit, that is likely to be eaten without further cooking.

Contacts

If you have a case of poliomyelitis in your home, school children must be kept away from school for three weeks, and they and younger children should not be allowed to mix with other people during this quarantine period.

Adult contacts can continue normal life as long as they remain fit and well, but should go to bed at the first sign of illness and inform the doctor. It is very important that anyone who has been in contact with a case, should be particularly careful to get plenty of rest, and to avoid physical strain, and fatigue.

There is no need, however, to become unduly worried when an epidemic occurs. Infantile paralysis is a frightening—and inaccurate—name, but the disease is not so dangerous as other risks we run every day, for example, road accidents.

Look at these figures.

In 1947, when there was the biggest outbreak of infantile paralysis in our history,

Road accidents killed 4,187 people

Poliomyelitis killed 688 people

Road accidents injured 35,000 people

Poliomyelitis maimed 1,000 people.

And the fact that such great men as Sir Walter Scott and President F. D. Roosevelt have been attacked by the disease disposes of the idea that it harms the intelligence.

These facts should help to keep you from undue anxiety—especially when you remember that you are not alone in the fight to control this epidemic. Your Medical Officer of Health, who is responsible for the health of the community, is behind you investigating all possible sources of infection, and applying local measures to control the spread of the disease. Doctors in the Ministry of Health keep a close watch on the country as a whole and any useful control measures are applied at once when and where they are necessary. And your own doctor is ready to advise you if you have the slightest grounds for suspicion.

But if the work of these experts is to be effective they must have the co-operation of every individual in the community. So it is important that you follow the advice given in this leaflet. By doing so you will know that you have done your best for your children and the children of others, as well.

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